

**Environmental Quality Incentive Program Delivery in
Androscoggin and Sagadahoc Counties, Maine
First Application Evaluation and Ranking Period of FY 2013**

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offers financial assistance to agricultural producers to implement on-farm conservation practices. Eligibility is determined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Eligible producers may apply for financial assistance on conservation practices that will address identified resource concerns on eligible land.

Interested agricultural producers may apply in person at the Lewiston USDA Service Center. Applicants may also request EQIP assistance by telephone, FAX, e-mail, or letter. Send to: 254 Goddard Road, Lewiston, Maine 04240, phone number 753-9400 extension 401, Fax number 783-4101, or email jim.johnson@me.usda.gov

Objective: The objective of the Androscoggin and Sagadahoc Local Work Group is to utilize EQIP to promote the use of conservation practices to benefit the environment while promoting sustainable agriculture and maintaining working farmland.

Priority Resource Concerns: In Androscoggin and Sagadahoc Counties, the Local Work Group (LWG) has identified and prioritized the following resource concerns.

HIGH

EQIP will be used to promote sustainable agriculture while maintaining and improving the quality of the environment. Practices that will positively affect farm management by promoting soil health, ensuring healthy pastures, improving pest management, promoting healthy forests, and utilizing waste appropriately will enable farms to thrive.

MEDIUM

Reducing soil erosion, control invasive species, and improving water quality were deemed medium priority concerns by the LWG. In addition, farm community engagement was also discussed and deemed a priority for the LWG. Specifically, the LWG believes farms that engage the community through farm stands, farmer's markets, Community Supported Agriculture, Pick-your-own, ag-education or ag-recreational activities help keep food local and provide opportunities for the community to connect with the farmers.

LOW

The LWG identified many issues that were of some concern, including water quantity, wildlife issues, and air quality.

Eligible Practices and Payment Rates: For a list of practices eligible for EQIP financial assistance in fiscal year 2013, see *County Eligible Practices and Payment Rate List*.

Sign-up: All program sign-up is continuous and applications may be taken at any time. Sign-up will be conducted according to local priorities and grouped along the lines of the resource areas that the State Technical Committee defined and that the LWG have recommended to be funded in 2013 based on the Natural Resource Assessment.

For each funding cycle, a cutoff date is established to provide time for screening and ranking. Applications received after the cutoff date is considered for the next funding cycle.

Conservation practices (both structural and management) in Forestland will be eligible for inclusion in a cost share contract only when a Forest Stewardship Plan, or other forest management plan that meets the State of Maine Stewardship Plan standard, has been developed for the acres to be enrolled in the program. Applications involving animal waste management such as waste storage facilities, milking center waste water treatment system, and heavy use area protection require the development of a comprehensive nutrient management plan (CNMP) prior to funding. There may be opportunities for financial assistance to obtain these specific types of plans. Landowners should contact the office to request assistance and information.

Ranking: All eligible applications received prior to the funding cycle cutoff date will be screened. Those determined to be High priority will be ranked based on an on-site resource inventory and assessment. Planners will develop alternative measure to address resource concerns based on their assessment and work with the applicant to come to decisions for practice application. Ranking will be based on the decisions the applicant makes for addressing the resource concerns.

The combined ranking sheet for Androscoggin and Sagadahoc Counties incorporates resource concerns and applicable quality criteria from the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide are the basis for ranking applications. A single combined ranking sheet will be completed for each farm or planning/contract area. Points will be assigned for those resource concerns that are not meeting quality criteria in the benchmark condition and will be improved as a result of implementation of the client's contract.

Applications will be selected for contracting in ranked order by resource area, according to their score, as available funds allow. If available funds are insufficient to contract all eligible applications, applications may be held (deferred) and considered for funding with any subsequently received applications during FY 2013 if another application ranking period is announced.

Funding: Periodic requests for program allocations will be scheduled throughout the year as funding permits. Separate program requests will be submitted by the District Conservationist according to the resource areas that the State Technical Committee defined and that the LWG has recommended be funded in 2013. Each of these requests will constitute a separate pool of ranked applications.

Allocation decisions to each Field Office will be made in the State Office based on national, state and local priorities, and the nature and extent of requests. Field Office Allocations will be split between each of the resource categories based on percentages set by the LWG, as shown below. Unfunded applications will be deferred to the next program request date.

Fund Pools: The Androscoggin and Sagadahoc Counties Local Work Group has decided to allocate the available EQIP funds as follows for FY2013:

Resource Category	% of Local Allocated Funding
Animal Waste	50%
Cropland (incl. hayland)	22%
Pasture	18%
Other: Small Farms*	10%

* A small farm is defined for this purpose as having ≤ 20 acres of farmable land or ≤ 20 animal units.

If you have any questions about how EQIP will be delivered in Androscoggin and Sagadahoc Counties, please contact Jim Johnson, District Conservationist, at 207-753-9400 x 401.